

**THE EFFECT OF PEER FIRMS IN DETERMINING FIRM CAPITAL
STRUCTURE: EVIDENCE FROM MANUFACTURING SECTOR IN
MALAYSIA**

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DEDICATION

This dissertation which is accomplished with the only grace of al-mighty Allah (SWT) is dedicated, with deepest love and everlasting respect, to my late grandmother and grandfather who have passed away while I was away pursuing my education.

To my beloved Bebe (Mother) Daje (Father) and siblings whose sacrifices their time, life and every things for our's wining. May All Mighty give them sound health, countless happiness and Barkah in their lives. Ameen.

To my close friends whose prayers, cooperation's and motivations always pave the way to success for me.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of peer firms' financial policies (capital structure) on target firm financing behaviour (capital structure), and to empirically test whether non-linear relationship of profitability with capital structure and growth opportunities exists. In order to achieve this, panel data techniques (static and dynamic) using the sample of 169 public listed firms from manufacturing sector over the period of 6 years (2011-2016) were used. The results showed that firm capital structure responses to the capital structure decisions of the peer firms, which suggests that firm in manufacturing sector does not make its capital decisions in isolation and peer firms decisions impact subject firm own decisions. The findings further reveal that peer effects mainly exists through the actions (actual capital structure policies) of peer firms rather than their characteristics and peer effect is the most important factor (determinant) of capital structure than prior identified factors. Moreover, the results demonstrate that a non-linear relationship of profitability with book leverage and growth opportunities exists. The non-linear relationship posits that at the optimal level, capital structure and growth opportunities increased firm profitability. However, when leverage and growth opportunities reach beyond the optimal level, a positive relationship switches to negative. Consequently, switching from positive to negative indicates non-linear relationship. The overall results are consistent with the previous studies of peer effects and non-linearity of profitability with capital structure and growth opportunities. Thus, this provides evidence that managers of the firms in manufacturing industry of Malaysia do not rationally weigh their peer financial policies; on the other hand, using higher debt in firm capital structure is associated with higher agency cost of debt. Moreover, the findings of the present study contribute into the literature of peer effects by validating, and extending the theoretical understanding for academic researchers' as well as for managers and policy makers.

ABSTRAK

Tujuan penyelidikan ini adalah untuk mengkaji kesan polisi kewangan firma-firma setara (struktur modal) ke atas amalan pembiayaan firma sasaran (struktur modal). Penyelidikan ini juga bertujuan untuk menguji secara empirikal samada terdapatnya hubungan secara tidak linear antara keuntungan dengan struktur modal dan peluang-peluang pertumbuhan. Bagi mencapai matlamat ini, teknik-teknik panel data (statik dan dinamik) telah digunapakai. Sebanyak 169 firma di sektor pembuatan yang telah tersenarai awam dalam tempoh 6 tahun (2011-2016) telah dipilih sebagai sampel kajian. Hasil Kajian menunjukkan struktur modal firma memberi respon terhadap keputusan struktur modal oleh firma-firma setara tersebut. Ini menunjukkan bahawa firma dalam sektor pembuatan tidak membuat keputusan modal secara bersendirian dan keputusan firma-firma setara memberi impak kepada keputusan firma tersebut. Hasil kajian juga menunjukkan wujudnya kesan setara terutamanya melalui tindakan-tindakan (polisi-polisi struktur kapital sebenar) berbanding ciri-ciri firma setara tersebut. Tambahan lagi, kesan setara merupakan faktor terpenting (penentu) bagi struktur modal berbanding faktor-faktor yang telah dikenalpasti sebelumnya. Hasil kajian turut menunjukkan wujudnya hubungan tidak linear keuntungan yang diukur berdasarkan ROA dan *book leverage* dan peluang-peluang pertumbuhan. Hubungan tidak linear tersebut menunjukkan bahawa pada tahap optimal, struktur modal dan peluang-peluang pertumbuhan akan meningkatkan keuntungan firma. Walaubagaimanapun, apabila *leverage* dan peluang-peluang pertumbuhan mencapai tahap yang lebih tinggi, hubungan positif berubah kepada negatif. Oleh yang demikian, perubahan daripada positif ke negatif menunjukkan hubungan tidak linear. Hasil keseluruhan kajian adalah konsisten dengan kajian kesan setara dan keuntungan tidak linear dengan struktur modal dan peluang-peluang pertumbuhan. Kesimpulannya, ini membuktikan bahawa para pengurus firma dalam industri pembuatan di Malaysia tidak memberikan pertimbangan secara rasional terhadap polisi-polisi kewangan setara mereka. Sebaliknya, penggunaan hutang yang lebih tinggi dalam struktur modal

firma dikaitkan dengan kos hutang agensi yang lebih tinggi. Tambahan lagi, dapatan-dapatan dalam kajian ini menyumbang kepada penulisan berkenaan kesan setara dengan mengesahkan serta mengembangkan pemahaman teori di kalangan para penyelidik akademik, pengurus dan pembuat polisi.



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PTTA UTHM
PERPUSTAKAAN TUNKU TUN AMINAH

LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACE Market	-	Access Certainty Efficiency
EBIT	-	Earnings before Interest and Tax
BL	-	Book Leverage
PBL	-	Peers Book Leverage
EBITDA	-	Earnings before Interest, Tax, Depreciation and Amortization
CEOs	-	Chief Executive Officers
CFOs	-	Chief Financial Officers
GDP	-	Gross Domestic Products
GLCs	-	Government Linked Companies
MEP	-	Malaysian Economic Plan
MM	-	Miller and Modigliani
OLS	-	Ordinary Least Square
PCs	-	Personal Computers
PPE	-	Property, Plant and Equipment
Q	-	Quarter
R&D	-	Research and Development
STO	-	Static Trade-Off
GMM	-	Generalized Method of Momentum
FE	-	Fixed Effect
RE	-	Random Effect
IV	-	Instrumental variable
TOT	-	Trade-off Theory
POT	-	Pecking Order Theory

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

There has been a growing interest recently in the peer effect and its impact on firms' financial policies, however it remains largely understudied in emerging countries (Park *et al.*, 2017). Industry peers not only play an essential role but also shape and design a variety of corporate decisions. Until now, evidences have shown that the importance of peer is often ignored during the decisions making process. Consequently, managers should need to take into account the importance of the peer decisions while making decisions for their own firms. As a result, an empirical study is needed to study whether peer firms' capital structure impact on firm's capital structure in manufacturing sector in Malaysia. Thus, the chapter further provides background to the study, the statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, and the significance of the study.

1.2 Background of the study

The choices of the optimal capital structure had been addressed extensively and are still a fertile area in the finance literature. The decision of a firm to finance its investment opportunities using optimal mix of equity or debt refers to capital structure. Since the groundbreaking study of the Modigliani and Miller (1958), which postulates that a firm capital structure is irrelevant to its value, a discussion among scholars emerged that models company capital structure decisions under various assumptions.

For instance, the static trade-off (hereafter STO) depends on bankruptcy cost of debt and tax advantage (Modigliani & Miller, 1963; Scott, 1977) whereas others used debt or equity is a channel or signal of information (Donaldson, 1961; Myers and Majluf, 1984; Myers, 1984; Titman and Wessels, 1988; Chung, 1993; Wiwattanakantang, 1999; Tong and Green, 2005; Chen, 2004).

Prior studies such as (Flannery & Rangan, 2006; Huang & Ritter, 2009) revealed that the capital structure is a key to firm's strategic decisions viewed from micro and macro level. At micro level, one of the critical decision for a firm is to efficiently obtain capital from various financing sources that affect firm future growth and survival. A firm's capital structure is the optimal mix of the debt and equity that represent the overall firm's obligations, which reflects the risk and cost associated with the debt financing. At the macro level, overall changes in the economy could influence a firms' financial structure. Therefore, managers need to take into account overall factors (social trend and industry dynamic among others) that influenced capital structure decisions (Cheng, 2015). Initially, the focus of empirical studies was limited to firm-specific determinants (i.e. profitability, size, assets tangibility, liquidity, sales growth). Subsequently, the focus shifted from these traditional determinants to understand the behaviour of the industry and its impact on firm's capital structure (Mackay & Phillips, 2005). However, researchers were mainly considered the indirect effect of industry on capital structure (Hyun *et al.*, 2015, 2019).

Until recently, extensive empirical research used to investigate capital structures and assumed that managers considered only firm specific factors, while setting their own firm capital structure decisions and ignore the effect of peer firms' financial decisions (Leary & Roberts, 2014; Hyun & Kang, 2015). According to Leary and Roberts (2014) and Billet *et al.* (2017) previous studies assumes that managers make their financial policies in isolation and externalities of peer¹ firms do not matter for such financial policies. However, some evidences came from surveys highlighting the relevance of peer firms' financial decisions for firms' financial structure. For example, Graham and Harvey (2001) documented in their survey that a significant number of Chief Financial Officers (Hereafter CFOs) revealed the importance of industry peer and conclude that their industry peer firms influenced their firms'

¹ Peer firms and companion firms are used interchangeably.

financial decisions. Leary and Roberts (2014) have pointed out that the presence of externalities generated by peer firms can effects other firms financial structure within the same peer group which they attribute learning and reputational motives of the firms.

Moreover, another study by Fracassi (2016) investigates corporate financial decisions in India, using a matrix of social ties, and concludes that socially connected companies have similar levels of investments. Similarly, Popadak (2012) also reports that peers' affect firm's dividend policy in the U.S corporations, while Matray (2015) finds that one firm's innovation forecast innovation of peer firms. However, prior empirical literature generally tends to either ignore, or passively sweep out such effects by controlling for industry mean and industry fixed effect (Leary & Roberts, 2014; Hyun *et al.*, 2018).

Firth (1996) also reports that a firm's dividend change is related to the share price performance of other firms within an industry. More recently, examining peers' effect in capital structure of Chines listed firms, Zhong and Zhang (2018) have demonstrated that peers' capital structure decisions significantly influence the Chines subject firms' capital structure decisions and following peers' economically significant in a situation when firm have learning motives. They documented that peer effect plays an important role in the determination of firm capital structure and debt maturity structure in China.

The phenomena of peer effect or peer group effect have been defined differently by various researchers. For instance, Hirshleifer and Teoh (2009) have documented that “individuals interact with each other directly and learn about each other's decisions through conversation”. Songsermsawas *et al.* (2014) stated that peer effect arises when peers' outcomes or peer characteristics shape individual outcomes within a group. Similarly, Leary and Roberts (2014) explain that when a company financial decision explicitly influenced by the characteristics or action of peer firms known as peer effect. Patnam (2011) defined the term peer effects as “the broad class of externalities that arise when a firm's own behaviour is responsive to the behaviour as well as the characteristics of other firms in its chosen reference group”. Additionally, Spyrou (2013) defined the mimic and mimicking behaviour as “when firms reliant the decisions of other and/or mimic each other decisions” which can be associated as peer effects. On the other hand, Manski (1993) define the peer effects as

“when a firm decision (s) or policies influenced by the decisions or policies of other firms in related a peer group called “endogenous” peer effects.

In addition, economic theory indicates that firms and individuals interact with each other and often follow each others’ decisions. For instance, Scharfstein and Stein (1990) suggest that corporate managers often underestimate his or her own private information or signal and emulate the choices or actions of others to avoid negative reputation. Popadak (2012) illustrates various economic forces that induce firm to behave like their peer firms. These are peer effects, contextual effect and common effect. Adhikari (2013) argues that imitating managers often concerned about his or her reputation. Therefore, managers send signals in the market about their own behaviour. This behaviour can be rational from the perspective of the managers who build their reputations in the corporate market. Lieberman and Asaba (2006) reviewed business imitation theories and conclude that there are two categories of theories such as information based theory and rivalry based theory. The former suggests that imitating behaviour arises when managers ignore their private information and believe that others have superior information, while the later suggests that when firms follow others to sustain competitive equality or minimize rivalry.

Perhaps, peer effect plays an essential role in determining corporate finance policies of the firm. It not only helps in designing but also shaping a wide range of corporate policies specifically capital structures policy. The extant findings also suggest the importance of peer firms for financial decisions that includes, savings decisions (Duflo & Saez, 2002) labour practices (Manning, 2005; Bizjak *et al.*, 2008) and credit rating by Hung *et al.* (2016). These findings show the importance of the companion firms and suggest that firms actually care about what happens to their peer when they making financial decision for their own firms accordingly to their peer (Graham & Harvey, 2001). Additionally, due to endogeneity² problem arising from the identification of peer firms’ selection within industry, the topic of peer effects in corporate finance has been largely understudied (Bustamante & Fresard, 2017). According to MacKay and Phillips, (2005) industry means financial structure ratios are the important factors of firm’s financial structure. Furthermore, several scholars (Miao, 2005; Frank & Goyal, 2009; Panigrahi, 2011; Moreira., 2017; Julia & Dorota,

² Endogeneity problem has discussed in section 3.8 in chapter 3.

2018) documented that debt ratio varies industry to industry, sector-to-sector, company to company and country to country because of industry, country and company-based variations in financial characteristics.

The present work determines the significance of peers' effect and peer characteristics as determinants of the firm's financial structure. Previous researchers were unable to interpret the direct effect of industry peers and generally considered the indirect effect of industry by using the average industry capital structure (Frank & Goyal, 2009; Timothy & Sally, 2010; Hyun, 2019). This research helps to recognize the interdependent policies as a significant component or determinant of the capital structure and for better understanding the externalities generated by peer effects. Present research may help in analysing the intra-industry differences in capital structure. Almazan and Molina (2005) also analyzed the intra-industry differences in capital structure. Thus, this research contributes to previous studies (Almazan and Molina, 2005; MacKay & Phillips, 2005; Leary & Robert, 2014) by exploring the difference which is associated with higher interdependencies in corporate financial policies. Amin *et al.* (2016) revealed that previous research on capital structure mainly considered firm specific characteristics and the performance of peer firm affecting capital structure is frequently ignored.

This study adopts peer firms and its characteristics as determinants of firm financial leverage in manufacturing sector in Malaysia and aims at filling in the gap to investigate the impact of peer firms in determining firm capital structure in manufacturing sector in Malaysia. In order to understand peer effect on firm financial structure, Leary and Roberts (2014) argued that firms from learning perspective might consider the financial health of their peers when determining its own capital structures.

1.3 Problem Statement

Peer effect and its impact on corporate decisions, particularly on capital structure decisions offers a promising area for research in corporate finance. Peer effect is a special form of direct influence that significantly affects and reshapes corporate decisions (Hyun *et al.*, 2015). Recent research has shown that peer firm can significantly affect corporate decisions (Duflo & Saez, 2003; Hong *et al.*, 2004; Ivković & Weisbenner, 2007; Brown *et al.*, 2008; Brown & Taylor, 2010; Beshears *et*

al., 2015; Bursztyn *et al.*, 2014 and Pool *et al.*, 2015), particularly capital structure decisions (Leary & Roberts, 2014; Amin *et al.*, 2016; Zhong & Zhang, 2018). This is in line with the idea that corporate interactions have a significant influence on a firm's financial decisions.

In addition, Banerjee (1992) and Bikhchandani *et al.* (1998) claimed that peer decisions play a valid source of information for a firm's own decision. Thus, when a firm is depending on peer information and adjusts their own capital structure accordingly, the peer effect takes place (Zhong and Zhang, 2018). In the similar vein, Simon *et al.* (2017) state that peer information (decisions) is typically available in various settings, which induce individuals to act accordingly.

The theoretical literature on peer effect is well grounded. For instance, the asymmetric information model (the pecking order theory) suggests that individuals are supposed to make decisions under incomplete and asymmetric information. Asymmetry information arises when managers are uncertain of the consequences of the outcomes or when they have difficulties in recognizing the cause and effect of their own private information (Lieberman & Asaba, 2006), eventually managers have the incentive to value their peer information while designing their own financing decisions (Chen & Ma, 2017). Thus, following peer information (decisions) minimizes information asymmetry between managers and outsiders for all firms within the industry, which reduce the overall cost of capital (Shroff *et al.*, 2017).

On the other hand, the principal-agent model (agency cost theory) states that a conflict between outsiders (shareholders) and insiders (managers) arises when managers make sub-optimal decisions by ignoring his private information and relying excessively on their peer decisions. Thus, depending on the decisions of other firms within the industry not only reduces firm profitability but also affect the firm capital structure (Duong *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, examining the peer effect on corporate decisions is relevant for understanding the dynamic of corporate interaction.

The peer effect on corporate decisions has attracted scholarly attention since the last two decade. For instance, recent studies have shown that firms don't make their corporate decisions, particularly capital structure decisions in isolation and take into account their industry peer capital structure decisions when determining their own capital structure decisions (Graham & Harvey, 2001; Leary & Roberts, 2014; Amin *et al.*, 2016; Zhong & Zhang, 2018). Despite the promising findings of the previous

studies, examined in advanced countries, the peer effect- capital structure literature is still in its infancy. Among the unresolved questions is the question of whether peer effect prevailing or not in developing countries. Alternatively, whether peer affects firm's leverage policies in different institutional settings, particularly in Malaysia. The lack attention to the role of peer firms on capital structure decisions in emerging countries, particularly in Malaysia is surprising given that the relationship between peer effect and firm capital structure decisions is well established in advanced countries both theoretically and empirically (Adhikari, 2013). More specifically, research on peer effect suggests and indicates that peer matter, and firm no longer ignore their peer decisions when they establish their capital structure decisions' (Leary and Roberts, 2014; Amin *et al.*, 2016; Zhong & Zhang, 2018).

Although, previous studies (Leary & Roberts, 2014; Amin *et al.*, 2016; Zhong & Zhang, 2018, few among others) worthily explored the relationship between peer averaged capital structure and target firm's capital structure by using instrumental variable (IVs) regression. However, one main limitation of the previous research is that it utilized research methodology that focus strictly on instrumental variable (IVs) as well as used the sample of countries having different institutional setting than Malaysia. For instance, Leary and Roberts (2014) used stock returns as an instrumental variable in their study. A valid instrument must ensure two conditions; the relevance condition and exogenous condition. However, recently Chen and Ma, (2017) claimed that stock prices (stock returns) in developing countries are not the most useful source of information due to the fact that stock markets of developing countries slowly developing and possesses a weak law enforcement record, which may not fully satisfy the fundamental conditions of a valid instrument.

Similarly, the existing literature also suggested that a firm's behaviour depends on a set of laws and regulations which induce firms to behave differently. Recent research has shown that institutional differences significantly influence firm' capital structure decisions (De Jong *et al.*, 2008; Antoniou *et al.*, 2008; Tesfaye & Minga, 2013). More specifically, Öztekin and Flannery, (2012) outlined that firms in developed markets follow a set of state and federal level laws and regulations, which are generally different from Malaysia. Malaysian firms comply with state laws and regulation which is less diverse compared to other markets. Consequently, institutional

differences or contextual changes make this study more important and crucial to understanding peer effects on capital structure decisions in Malaysia.

In Malaysia, previous research has highlighted that a firm's specific determinants significantly influence a firm's capital structure which yields contradictory findings (Ramli *et al.*, 2019). Najjar and Hussainey (2011) and Haron (2013) also documented that capital structure extensively examined in advanced economies whereas in developing markets including Malaysia, what determines an optimal capital structure still remains an inconclusive subject among managers and practitioners (Haron, 2014). According to Hussain *et al.* (2015) factors influencing the capital structure in Malaysia is still an issue because very few industries or sectors have been studied.

Several scholars such as (San & Heng, 2011; Salim & Yadav, 2012) aptly explained that the influence of the capital structure in Malaysia is still rare and have done according to different size of firms and specific sectors, which shows an insufficient evidence to generalize to the overall Malaysian economy. Foo *et al.* (2015) argue that the "consensus on what qualifies for the optimal capital structure also leads to the importance of this study in Malaysia". Buvanendra *et al.* (2016) stated that available research in capital structure in emerging markets mainly dealt with the firm's specific factors. More in-depth and extensive investigation is demanded to study the influence of other factors on capital structure. Xuan (2016) also reports that factors behind the firm's financial policies in emerging countries still a fertile area for further investigation

A capital structure is said to be an optimal capital structure that not only maximizes financial performance but also minimizes the cost of external funding at the lower possible level. The trade-off model of the capital structure suggests that there is an optimal capital structure when the cost of debt equal to the benefits (tax saving) of debt (Tang & Jang, 2007; and Jang *et al.*, 2008), whereas, the principle-agent model (agency cost theory) posits that an optimal capital structure not only optimally solved agency problem between managers and owners but also maximize firm performance.

Till to date, the vast majority of studies examined and documented mainly positive or negative (linear relationship) relationship between profitability and capital structure (Salim & Yadav, 2012; Gungoraydinoglu & Öztekin, 2011; Degryse *et al.*, 2012; Basit & Hassan, 2017; Li *et al.*, 2019). However, recent studies show that there

is nonlinear (both positive and negative or mixed) relationship between profitability and capital structure (Berger and Udell, 2006; Le & Phan, 2017). Additionally, The principal-agent model also predicts and demonstrates that debt increase firm performance (positive or linear relationship) but using a higher proportion of leverage beyond the optimal level not only reduce profitability but also increase agency problems (nonlinear or both positive and negative relation) (Berger and Udell, 2006). Thus, switching from a positive relationship to negative produces curvilinear inverse relationship (U-shaped) between profitability and capital structure.

Furthermore, profitability maximization is one of the core objectives of the managers. However, the extant literature has pointed out that managers' want to maximize firm growth rather than profitability (Fama & Jensen, 1983; Jensen, 1986). The financial management literature claims that profit maximization and growth are the two competing goals of the firm and managers simultaneously could not pursue both goals. Thus, they forgo profit over growth or vice versa (Seungkyu & Jaejun, 2015). In addition, the literature documented both positive and negative relationship between profitability and growth (Le and Phang, 2017). Lee, (2014) outlined that there is a trade-off between the two, and can be captured by nonlinear models. The nonlinear relationship of profitability with growth opportunities shows that profitability has a positive correlation with growth (profitability increases as growth opportunities increases), but this positive relation switches to negative when growth becomes too high.

The main purpose of the present study is to examine the significances of peer effect on the capital structure as well as a nonlinear (U- shape) relationship of profitability with capital structure and growth opportunities within manufacturing sector in Malaysia. Thus, the findings of this research not only produce interesting results but also enhance and contribute to the peer literature, and it also substantial to various stakeholders. Previous studies of peer effect on capital structure carried out in advanced and emerging countries (e.g. U.S, China and Pakistan). However, the limited understanding and the lack of the empirical evidences of peer effect on capital structure as well as the gap in the literature, particularly in Malaysia, the questions, whether peer firms matters for firm capital structure decisions, and why firms' interconnected within industry, largely understudy in advance and emerging market (Zhong & Zhang, 2018; Bustamante & Frèsard, 2017). To the best of the author's knowledge, till to date, no

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